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Clinton, Gore Attack GOP on Education

Funding Cuts Are Decried as White House Opens Week of Criticism

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President Clinton and Vice President Gore joined forces yesterday to open a week of attacks on the GOP "Contract With America," warning that Republican cuts in education programs would cripple the nation's ability to create jobs in the global economy of the next century.

Speaking to a sun-drenched crowd on the campus of Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Clinton said he supported efforts to reduce "unnecessary, wasteful, bloated government" in Washington but asserted that cuts in education funding "will be just as dangerous as it would have been for us to disarm in the middle of the Cold War."

"This is not rocket science," he added. "This is basic and this is America's future."

Gore, playing the attack role traditional for a vice president, was far more biting. In a speech to the National Press Club, he criticized the Republicans on several fronts and said the GOP Congress "spent most of their first 100 days establishing a reputation as the most anti-education Congress in the history of this country."

Clinton, who returns to Washington today from a weekend visit to his home state, recalled his years as governor in arguing that investments in education are as important to the nation's economic health today as they were in lifting Arkansas from its chronically low economic standing.

"Arkansas is not where it is today because we cut education," he said. "You should say to all of us—get that deficit down, get this economy going. Be fair to American taxpayers. But do not cut education."

"Yes, we have to get things under control in Washington," he added. "But we dare not in the information age believe that the answer to America's growing insecurity about jobs and income is to undermine the very thing that will take us into the

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21st century still the strongest country in the world."

In Washington, Gore, designated as the leadoff Democrat in a week devoted to attacking the contract, condemned the GOP as being the handmaidens of corporate lobbyists seeking to ruin the water and air, of representing billionaire Americans trying to abandon their citizenship to save taxes and of denying loans to students, school lunches to children, full Medicare coverage to seniors and more.

"The first 100 days of this Congress will not be remembered for bipartisanship or . . . accomplishments for the American people," Gore said. "They will be remembered for the damage done by the [GOP] contract."

Gore's address was a compilation of three months' worth of Democratic charges against different parts of the contract that add up to assertions that Republicans are taking benefits from the middle class and the needy to give tax breaks to the wealthy and benefits to the well-heeled.

On environmental issues, Gore said Republican leadership "relies directly on the lobbyists for the polluters to write the laws" rolling back protections of clean air and water.

But the "worst part" of the program, Gore said, is the tax cut proposals. "They're cutting school lunches to give the wealthy a free lunch," he said.

Mark Gearan, White House director of strategic planning, said Gore and others in the administration would use the week in a "defining debate" over the differences between what Clinton and what the GOP stand for, with a particular emphasis on education. Clinton is to make the education case himself in a series of speeches from Friday through Sunday.

Walsh reported from Jonesboro, Devroy from Washington.